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ABSTRACT

The text's primary purpose is to influence the actions of local school leaders, and it argues that standards-based reform is as much about confronting strongly held beliefs and values about schooling as it is about creating standards, documents, and assessment tools. Examples of organizational learning activities designed to increase individual and organizational capacity to initiate and sustain standards-based school practices are offered. The text opens with an overview of the promise of standards-based reform, offering advice on what the standards should be and how they will affect teachers' work. The booklet claims that a new mental model is needed, and it describes what students, teachers, and schools would have to do in a standards-based system. The third section features a series of exercises to help explain the issues surrounding standards, including the case for common, explicit standards, what is meant by "all students," the implications of standards-based reform, and the dilemmas inherent in standards setting. (RJM)

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Standards
From Document to Dialogue

Kate Jamentz

WestEd

About WestEd

WestEd is a non-profit research, development and service agency dedicated to improving education and other opportunities for children, youth and adults. Drawing on the best from research and practice, we work with practitioners, policymakers and others in the broader education community to address critical issues in education and other related areas: from early childhood intervention and support to school-to-work transition, from standards and assessment development to safe schools and safe communities. In addition to its research and development work, WestEd offers program evaluation, policy analysis, professional development and other key services.

The agency was created in 1995 to unite and enhance the capacity of Far West Laboratory and Southwest Regional Laboratory, two of the nation's original education laboratories created by Congress in 1966. In addition to our work across the nation, WestEd serves as the regional education laboratory for Arizona, California, Nevada and Utah. The organization is headquartered in San Francisco, with additional offices in Arizona, Massachusetts, Washington, D.C. and elsewhere in California.

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Preface

AUTHENTIC STANDARDS-BASED SCHOOL REFORM DEMANDS revolutionary, not simply evolutionary, change. While on the surface, standards-based reform is about setting clear and public targets for student performance, at heart it challenges deeply held beliefs about what teachers do and how schools should operate.

For more than 10 years "high standards for all students" has been the rallying cry behind a wide variety of efforts to improve schools. Both grassroots reform efforts and legislative mandates champion the cause. To date states, districts and schools have generated countless and varied standards documents that detail what students should know and be able to do. In some cases, new assessments have been developed to accompany them. Yet even today educators and the public have few examples of the ways these tools can be used to effect the kinds of profound changes in school practice required if all students are to achieve high standards.

Even enthusiasts have become impatient. Recognizing the time and complexity involved in having come even this far, school leaders reasonably wonder how long it will take to complete the process of developing, adopting or adapting standards and related assessments. Moreover, many admit to being overwhelmed by the challenges inherent in refocusing the work of the school on assuring high achievement by all students. As the effort drags on, the vision of transformed school practice begins to fade.

This document suggests that the progress of standards-based reform is inhibited by deeply ingrained assumptions about what standards

are, how they are developed and how they should be used in a school system. The work of the Western Assessment Collaborative at WestEd argues that profound change in professional and organizational practice will require the adoption of new "mental models" about standards — new ways of thinking that facilitate change in the ways schools operate and, most importantly, in the nature and quality of work teachers do and students produce.

The primary intent of this document is to influence the actions of local school leaders — administrators, parents, students and teachers. It argues that standards-based reform is as much about confronting strongly held beliefs and values about schooling as it is about creating standards documents and assessment tools. It urges local leaders to begin now, not only the process of writing or adopting standards, but the equally important process of building the capacity of individuals throughout the system to use standards to guide their work.

To that end, this document provides examples of organizational learning activities designed to increase individual and organizational capacity to initiate and sustain standards-based school practice. We attempt here not only to identify the challenges inherent in standards-based reform, but to suggest and facilitate the kinds of dialogue that we believe will support school communities to operate in profound new ways.

Acknowledgments

The Western Assessment Collaborative is a research and development project focused on the study and support of standards-based reform. Over the last two years, its work has targeted a group of districts and schools whose reform efforts are funded by Hewlett-Annenberg Challenge grants through the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative (BASRC). The staff and community leaders from these schools have contributed a great deal to our learning and to the development of this document.

The activities described in the last section are drawn from professional development opportunities provided by WAC to BASRC districts and schools. They were developed and fine-tuned over many trials by members of the WAC staff including Mary Camezon, John Larmer and Trudy Schoneman. WAC wishes to thank the hundreds of teachers, parents and other school leaders who participated in and provided feedback on these exercises and who continue to use them to further work in their own schools.

We would also like to acknowledge the contributions of colleagues in the school reform community and at WestEd, who commented on various drafts of this document. These include:

Amy Gerstein, Coalition of Essential Schools; Merrill Vargo, Bay Area School Reform Collaborative; Karen Kearney, California School Leadership Academy; Audrey Poppers, San Mateo-Foster City School District; Laura Cooper, Evanston Township High School; and WestEd staff, including BethAnn Berliner, Stanley Rabinowitz, Sri Ananda, Paul Hood, Jim Johnson, Joy Zimmerman and Gary Estes.

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The Elusive Promise of Standards-based Reform

THE TOPIC OF HIGH STANDARDS CANNOT BE IGNORED IN SCHOOLS today. Pushed by grass-roots reform efforts or pulled along by top-down accountability plans, district and school leaders and classroom teachers throughout the nation are immersed in the work of defining, adopting or implementing standards for student performance. Drawn by the intuitively sound notion that common standards for student performance will provide a more meaningful way to determine the quality of school systems and, therefore, better guide improvement efforts, the President and Congress of the United States, business leaders, state legislators, state departments of education and local district and school leaders have joined the chorus for standards-based school reform. But 10 years after the first call for high, consistent and public student performance standards, questions remain about how to keep standards work from becoming just one more labor-intensive but impotent reform effort.

Doubters can be found not only in those schools that are responding to an external mandate for standards, but even in schools that have initiated their own efforts to organize around clear expectations for student performance. Scratch the surface of the initial rhetoric even in path-finding schools and it is easy to find educators suspicious of the motivation behind the movement, confused by its demanding new vocabulary, threatened by the invasion of public opinion into classroom practice and disconcerted about the implications for their own work.

The logic of standards-based reform is elegant and simple. School communities need to agree on what students should know and be

able to do and on how well. Assessment tools should be designed to measure each student's progress in achieving those standards and assessment data used to target the resources of the school to assure progress by all students. Promotion through school and, eventually, graduation, should be based on demonstrated achievement of the agreed-upon standards.

But as logical — and attractive — as it sounds, standards-based reform challenges many traditional school practices and the assumptions on which they are based. Traditional instructional practice emphasizes the design of activities to "cover the curriculum." In this context, standards of performance are set by individual teachers, often differing from classroom to classroom. Teachers plan lessons; review the student work produced; distinguish students' relative achievement with letter grades — and then move on. Subsequent lessons cover new material in the text or curriculum guide, irrespective of whether every student has learned and understood the earlier lessons. Students, parents and the public have accepted that some teachers are "hard graders" while others are not. Some students "get it" and others do not.

If schools are really committed to organizing themselves so all students achieve high standards, much of school as we know it is likely to change. Called into question are familiar structures such as grade placements by age, traditional grading practices and even the amount of time students spend in school. Ruth Mitchell writes about the effect of standards on traditional school practice.

Standards aren't change in themselves — it's their effect that's important: nothing less than reversing the model of schooling as we know it. To this point, education has mirrored the stratification of society; 20 percent excelled and took professional positions expected by their socioeconomic status; 80 percent sat out their years in school and moved into blue collar or service jobs... The system inputs remained the same and the outcomes varied ... students were sorted and selected and the results could be predicted fairly accurately from race, income level and family background.

In a standards model, the outcomes are held steady and the inputs vary. The system is responsible for seeing that all students meet the standards, no matter how different their needs may be. "All children can learn" has become a shibboleth of educational moral rectitude, but in a standards system, we have the incentive to deliver on it. What counts is not a student's achievement relative to other students, but relative to the standards.

The consequences for the educational system are profound. At every level, from the district central office to the classroom, one vital question determines policy and practice: "Does this help all students meet the standard?" (Mitchell, Fall 1994)

Yet even in those schools at the forefront of standards-based reform, profound change remains elusive. Even among those who champion the cause, a number of paralyzing questions seem to weigh down both enthusiasm and action.

Challenges from the Choir

The Western Assessment Collaborative at WestEd is a research and development project that studies and supports standards-based reform. Over the course of the last two years, it has worked with a group of San Francisco Bay Area schools whose reform efforts are funded by Hewlett-Annenberg Challenge grants. In the grant selection process, these schools were identified as having made a commitment to, and at least some progress in, setting and using standards to focus their work. The following issues are among those most commonly identified by these pioneers of standards-based reform.

Whose standards should these be?

Not long after getting a standards-setting effort underway, the big question arises: Who should determine what students should know and do? Should this be determined at the national level, by states or by local communities? This query acknowledges the diversity of opinions represented in most communities, on most faculties and even among the "experts" in most curriculum content areas. Whose voices should be included when a school community sets standards for student performance? How centralized and how inclusive should the standards-setting process be?

Many educators are deeply troubled by the prospect of setting high standards for all students without first securing changes in the system that supports students in achieving them.

Many local leaders question the feasibility — and even the wisdom — of involving diverse stakeholders in decisions about the adoption or articulation of standards for student performance. For some, the issue is that of weighing professional judgment against public input. One principal describes her concerns about bringing parents into her school's standards-setting process: "I know their voices are important, but what do I tell a professional educator who has years of preparation and experience in her job? That her opinion counts less than Mom's?"

For others, the question of how wide the net should be cast in standards-setting raises questions about capacity. School leaders wonder how they will find the time to seek out the opinions of various stakeholders; they question the feasibility of hearing from everyone who might want to be heard; and they doubt their own skill in helping these diverse groups reach any sort of agreement. Still others wonder whether it's really the responsibility of educators to get public input or buy-in for standards. "Why should schools have to take the lead in getting people to agree? Schools only reflect what's out in the community, and if there is no consensus in that community, how am I going to be able to build one?"

Requirements for what people must know and be able to do in order to succeed outside school have changed dramatically. Yet the system inside schools has remained virtually the same.

Champions of national or statewide standards argue that adoption of such standards would free individual school communities from "having to reinvent the wheel." Further, they suggest, adoption of state or national standards would also facilitate comparisons among states or districts, thereby promoting equity and ameliorating some of the problems related to student mobility. But local leaders speculate that the more remote the standards-setting process, the less likely teachers will be to understand, adopt or use the standards.

Even the most enthusiastic supporters of articulating community-wide standards are daunted by the reality that the population of a school community — its students, parents, faculty and leadership — is seldom stable. "How do we keep a common focus when the players are constantly changing?" they ask.

Do we really mean "all" students?

A central tenet of the standards movement is that, given adequate resources and support and a willingness to work, "all students" can learn what a school community defines as critical for students to know and be able to do. However, because traditional school practice runs counter to this fundamental belief, so, too, does the experience of most classroom teachers.

"Not all students can meet high standards," argues one teacher. "What do we do with the students who can't reach them?" asks another. "I want high standards for all kids," comments a third, "but they'll have to be different for kids with different abilities." Teacher comments like these reveal an ambivalence about the possibility of setting agreed-upon

standards that are both challenging and attainable by all students. Many educators share a deep concern that common standards for all will necessarily mean standards too low for many.

In a different vein, many educators are deeply troubled by the prospect of setting high standards for all students without first securing changes in the system that supports students in achieving them. They recognize that absent changes in resource allocations and instructional practices, higher standards might further marginalize students who already perform poorly in school.

As traditionally organized, schools effectively support only *some* students in achieving high standards. Eager learners are pushed to produce work of high intellectual quality; others, if not leaving school entirely, remain and are promoted despite having produced only to minimal levels of achievement. Historically, this type of system served the needs of society and the workplace. Students uninterested in intellectual pursuits left school and were able to make important contributions at home, on the farm or in jobs requiring low-level skills, such as manufacturing. Unfortunately, this is no longer true. Requirements for what people must know and be able to do in order to succeed outside school have changed dramatically. Yet the system inside schools has remained virtually the same.

Recognizing recent advances in disciplines such as science and cognitive psychology, educators wonder how a fixed target can accommodate the fact that knowledge itself changes over time.

Teacher work and school organization have traditionally been defined by this system of differentiated standards. And despite decades of call for reform, most schools today look similar to one another — and much the same as they did 50 years ago (Tyack & Tobin, 1989). In the name of order and fairness, schools have been structured to "batch process" students. Nearly all elementary students are placed into grade levels and taught by a single teacher in a self-contained classroom. High school students study in 55-minute periods covering distinct subjects with different teachers over the course of 150–180 days. Teachers are expected to cover curriculum, to plan instruction that engages as many students as possible, to assess achievement and to move on. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that educators have trouble envisioning schools that break the mold and organize to assure that all students can reach publicly agreed-upon high standards of achievement.

What exactly is a standard? And which are the "right" ones?

The standards movement has added to the cacophony of "educationese." In its name, schools are challenged to develop or adopt *holistic outcomes, content standards, performance standards, program delivery standards, opportunity-to-learn standards, performance indicators, rubrics* and *benchmarks.* Much time is spent deciphering the meaning of these terms and then arguing over the format of each.

A standard for third-grade reading, for example, differs greatly in format from one school to the next. One defines achievement as "Students will read and understand a variety of texts for a variety of purposes." A second states that "all third graders will read third-grade material successfully by the end of third grade." A third requires that "students will read and demonstrate understanding of 25 works from suggested texts at the third-grade level." And yet another provides a rubric with an extensive list of descriptors of behaviors applicable to proficient third-grade readers. The variety of formats cannot help but raise suspicion that one format must be more "right" than another. "Surely someone can tell me how to do this by now," pleads one principal charged with leading the standards-setting effort in her school.

Many doubts are also raised by the seemingly static nature of the term "standard." Recognizing recent advances in disciplines such as science and cognitive psychology, educators wonder how a fixed target can accommodate the fact that knowledge itself changes over time.

What will this have to do with my work?

Just under the surface of many standards-setting processes are very real suspicions about their purpose. Many teachers worry that common standards will impinge on their academic freedom and autonomy. Others declare that they "already have standards," and they experience as criticism of their work any organizational efforts to impose others. Many also worry that the standards will overemphasize certain outcomes at the expense of others they consider equally or even more important to student performance.

Yet despite these expressed concerns, classroom practice seems somewhat impervious to the influence of common standards for student performance. One teacher noted that her colleagues had "done a lot of work" with the school's standards. "But it hasn't reached the kids yet," she added. "I don't think they know we have them."

Indeed, to date, the focus of many standards-setting efforts seems to have been more on getting a document into print than on using those standards to guide changes in what students or teachers do.

The above questions — raised, as they are, in path-finding schools — suggest a struggle to fit an intuitively logical and linear process in a notoriously loosely-coupled system. The vision to which pioneers of standards-based reform aspire is that of a rational process: setting common targets, measuring progress toward them and aligning practice to achieve them. Yet in working toward that vision, reformers butt up against the reality that school organizations seldom behave rationally; that they are populated by and serve a variety of diverse voices and needs; and that they are notoriously reluctant to change. Leaders in these pioneering school are clearly attracted to standards-based reform's inherent promise of focus and coherence. At the same time, however, they are aware, and even protective, of the diversity that makes this change so difficult.

The clash between the promise of standards-based reform and the skepticism embodied in the questions above suggests that we may need a new way of thinking about standards — about what they are, and about how they can be articulated and sustained in the complex and diverse organization called school. Pushing forward, even for the initial enthusiasts, may require a new mental model.

The Need for A New Mental Model

ORGANIZATIONAL THEORISTS SUGGEST THAT AMONG THE MOST powerful inhibitors of change are the underlying assumptions individuals hold about the way things are or should be. Our "mental models," they argue, dictate what we see and how we behave. Individuals resist change when a new concept doesn't fit with that person's well ingrained assumptions about how the world operates. Organizational learning is stimulated when individuals within learn the discipline of mental modeling: when they develop the habit of identifying the assumptions on which they base their actions; of questioning the validity of those assumptions; and of stretching to invent, as necessary, different mental models that may liberate them to act in new ways (Senge, 1990).

Education offers some examples of how mental modeling works. In the past 20 years, the profession's mental model of the principalship has changed from "building manager and disciplinarian" to "instructional leader." The literature on school leadership is full of stories in which that shift in perception has caused principals to set new priorities and behave in new ways. The newer mental model challenges them to put student learning in the forefront of thought and action. Principals who define themselves as instructional leaders do not abandon management or disciplinary responsibilities, but consider how their actions in those areas can best contribute to student learning.

In a similar fashion, the mental model of education as "schooling" has been called into question in many communities. Once, improving

"education" meant focusing attention on the activities of elementary, middle and high schools. But attending only to those institutions made little difference for many learners. More recently, our assumptions about where education takes place have broadened. Seeing education as "a life-long learning process" inspires action in prenatal and pre-school care, parent education, and after-school and community support programs. The confusions and concerns of educators at the forefront of standards-based reform, and the slow pace of their progress, suggest that this movement could benefit as well from a new way of thinking about the work.

Nothing about a standards document, or even new assessment tools, ensures that the individuals accountable to the standards will want, or know how, to use them to guide change in what they *do*.

The pervasive mental model of standard setting in schools is that of creating a document that defines fixed targets. Schools report that they "have standards" when they can point to a publication that has been given to teachers or a brochure sent to parents detailing an approved answer to the question "What should students know and be able to do?" Many of the issues raised in the previous section suggest that these school leaders assume that the challenge is about setting the "right" targets and then "implementing" them with the support of high stakes assessment tools.

This view of standards as fixed rulers by which we can measure performance across time and a variety of users is the one most often reflected in literature about standards-based reform. But Dennie Wolf, of Harvard University, calls our attention to another, perhaps equally important way of thinking about the term *standard*. She reminds us that the word is also defined as "a pole or spear bearing some conspicuous object on top, formerly used in an army or fleet to mark a rallying point, to signal or to serve as an emblem."

While less familiar, this definition, Wolf suggests, may be no less powerful an image for promoting school reform. In this sense, standards are essentially nominations of what is valued or worth fighting for and, therefore, a call to action. As such, they have the potential to provoke allegiance, resistance, conversation and even debate.

Wolf challenges schools to think about and use standards in both ways:

> *We need standards that remain alive to the ongoing conversation about what knowledge is — that preserves a spectrum of opinion — even doubts. Without that, the standards will freeze in place accounts of knowledge and standards for performance when, in fact, both are problematically alive and changing.... Worthwhile standards require humility — the sense*

that they are not a miracle cure, but one turn in what ought to be a much wider conversation about what will permit substantial education reform. (Wolf in Cobb, 1994)

In focusing standards-setting efforts on the creation of a standards document, reform leaders ignore the reality that schools are staffed by, and serve, a variety of diverse individuals who share no consensus about the purpose of schooling and who have no habit of — and little structural support for — working toward common goals. Nothing about a standards document, or even new assessment tools, ensures that the individuals accountable to the standards will want, or know how, to use them to guide change in what they *do*.

Students would have the capacity to become active managers of their own learning

The work of the Western Assessment Collaborative suggests that the cause of standards-based reform might be accelerated by framing a new mental model of the standards-setting process, one that melds the desire for common measures with a commitment to ongoing conversation about what's worth knowing and what quality work looks like — for students, for teachers and for schools.

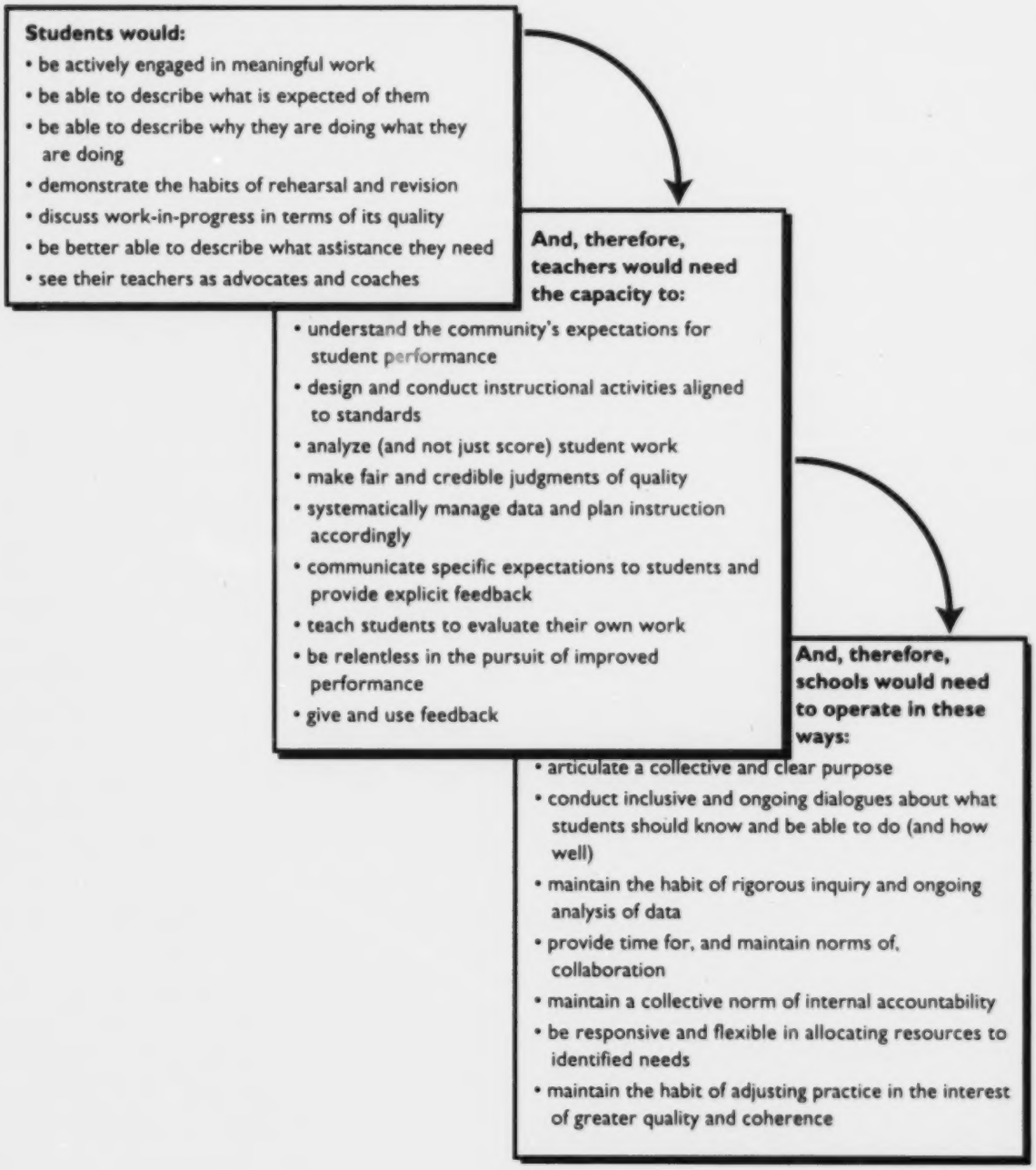
The Demand for Dialogue

New mental models evolve only when we are willing to question our assumptions and look at the world in new ways. In order to generate a new mental model of standards work in schools, let's set aside for a moment the image of a fixed target and envision, instead, the actions of individuals and school communities engaged in standards-based practice. (See Figure on page 11)

In a standards-based system, students would ...

In a standards-based system committed to high achievement by *all* students, all students would be actively engaged in meaningful work. Because the expectations for performance are explicit and clear, students would be able to describe the kind and quality of work they need to do and why they need to do it. In schools where high standards were in place, students would describe their work-in-progress in terms of its quality, and they would habitually rehearse and revise in order to improve it. They would experience their teachers as advocates and coaches, who

What will schools look like when they organize around a commitment to the achievement of high standards by all students?


Students would:
• be actively engaged in meaningful work
• be able to describe what is expected of them
• be able to describe why they are doing what they are doing
• demonstrate the habits of rehearsal and revision
• discuss work-in-progress in terms of its quality
• be better able to describe what assistance they need
• see their teachers as advocates and coaches
And, therefore, teachers would need the capacity to:
• understand the community's expectations for student performance
• design and conduct instructional activities aligned to standards
• analyze (and not just score) student work
• make fair and credible judgments of quality
• systematically manage data and plan instruction accordingly
• communicate specific expectations to students and provide explicit feedback
• teach students to evaluate their own work
• be relentless in the pursuit of improved performance
• give and use feedback
And, therefore, schools would need to operate in these ways:
• articulate a collective and clear purpose
• conduct inclusive and ongoing dialogues about what students should know and be able to do (and how well)
• maintain the habit of rigorous inquiry and ongoing analysis of data
• provide time for, and maintain norms of, collaboration
• maintain a collective norm of internal accountability
• be responsive and flexible in allocating resources to identified needs
• maintain the habit of adjusting practice in the interest of greater quality and coherence

not only give assignments to students, but *work with* students to provide the guidance and learning opportunities they need to reach commonly understood goals. Students, themselves, would be able to describe and seek out the assistance they needed in order to improve their work. They would have the capacity to become active managers of their own learning.

And, therefore, teachers would ...

Students are unlikely to act in these ways unless their teachers are both willing and able to make significant changes in traditional teaching practice. "Higher standards for all" is not just about teaching new material to more students or becoming a more demanding judge of performance. Standards-based reform demands subtle, but profound shifts in what teachers are expected to do and how they go about their work.

In order for students to become clear about expectations for their performance and able to actively manage their own learning, teachers themselves would have to understand and support the community's standards for what students should know and be able to do and how well. They would have to be able to plan backwards from the performance standards, designing instructional activities that could efficiently and effectively guide students to practice and eventually achieve the standards.

Teachers in a standards-driven system would need the skill and time not just to grade or score student work, but to analyze it; diagnosing what students already knew and could do; where or how they were confused; and what they indicated a readiness to learn. They would need the means to systematically manage the data they had on each student and to plan instruction accordingly. They would also need the habit of relentlessness — the willingness to try a variety of instructional strategies until the standard had been achieved.

Maintaining common standards of practice would require that educators be given both the opportunity *and* the responsibility for negotiating shared understanding, collaborating on action plans and analyzing the efficacy of their collective efforts.

In a school committed to high standards for all students, decisions about what to teach next would be based on a teacher's knowledge of shared expectations for student performance and her diagnosis of what each student already knew and needed to learn. Teachers' judgments of student performance would be based on community-wide agreements about what constitutes quality work, and their feedback to students would explain specific ways in which the work could be

improved. Students could expect that work rated by one teacher would receive a similar response in another teacher's class.

In a standards-based system, teachers would be responsible for planning instruction that was not only engaging, but targeted on public and shared expectations for quality and on the assessed needs of individual learners. Both students and teachers could be expected to become habitual givers and users of feedback in a process of continuous improvement.

And, therefore, schools must....

It is clear that standards-driven practice involves significant levels of communication and collaboration among teachers and between teachers and students. To build and sustain that capacity, schools must operate in significantly different ways.

Standards-based schools must transcend what has been described as the traditional "egg-crate" structure of autonomous, isolated classrooms. Maintaining common standards of practice would require that educators be given both the opportunity *and* the responsibility for negotiating shared understanding, collaborating on action plans and analyzing the efficacy of their collective efforts.

> *Teachers individually cannot reconceive their practice and the culture of their workplace. Yet almost everything about school is oriented toward going it alone professionally. While it may be possible for teachers to learn some things on their own, rethinking old norms requires a supportive community of practice. The traditional school organization separates staff members from one another and from the external environment. Inside school, teachers are inclined to think in terms of "my classroom," "my subject" or "my kids." Few schools are structured to allow teachers to think in terms of shared problems or broader organizational goals. (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995)*

The very nature of "professional development" is likely to change. Agreeing on and working toward common standards of student performance will require that the locus of professional learning turn from the occasional workshop to contextualized, ongoing organizational learning based on reflection, collaboration and joint action. Expectations for the quality of student work and standards for professional practice are likely to change over time as teachers share new teaching strategies and confront what they may have believed to be their own limits and those of their students.

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Just as standards-driven schools must break down the walls that isolate teachers from one another, so, too, must they eliminate the barriers that have tended to isolate them from the broader community. Arriving at commonly held standards for student performance and bringing them to life requires a level of public engagement not traditionally found in most school communities.

In an essay entitled *Not Without Parents*, national PTA leaders warn educators and legislators about the dangers of leaving parents out of the conversation about what is important for students to know and be able to do. Decrying what they feel has, to date, been too closed a process, the authors ask, rhetorically:

> *Why is it surprising then that the new standards are not having more of an impact, when most states and communities have not built the capacity for the larger society to become involved. Or put in another context, how is it possible to implement 21st century standards with 20th century models of citizen and parent participation?*
>
> *The challenge is to democratize the discussion, which to many parents appears to be top-down, coercive, exclusive and unrelated to the needs of their communities and to their personal lives. (Dysktra & Fege, 1997)*

And parents are not the only members of the broader school community who want in on the conversation. Challenges to standards developed by states and schools across the country indicate that professional associations, business and religious leaders all want assurance that their voices are heard. Even in cases where schools plan to adopt standards created at the state or national level, it is clear that buy-in from the community will require local negotiations.

The standards conversation provides an opportunity for negotiating community values and conducting the long overdue examination of the purpose and goals of schooling. But it is a conversation that cannot be left to educators. Public support for education in a rapidly changing world requires that communities seek out and consider the interests of the many diverse groups who have a stake in the future of public schools.

The standards document becomes not an end in itself, but a tool for generating the conversation that builds ownership and the capacity for action.

Standards-based reform is likely to challenge the fundamental grammar of schooling as we know it. The traditional "batch processing" of students will necessarily give way to far greater consideration of the differences among students: their preparation for school, the ways they learn and the pace at which they learn. School systems will have to become

far more responsive and flexible in allocating resources, such as time and expertise, to identified needs. Changing a system that has remained much the same for nearly 100 years will require that schools and the larger community support conversation within and beyond school walls.

> *Humans build organizations and can change them. Cultural constructions of schooling have changed over time and can change again. To do this deliberately would require intense and continual public dialogue about the ends and means of schooling ... Shared beliefs could energize a broad social movement to remake schools. To do so would require reaching beyond a cadre of committed reformers to involve the public in a broad commitment to change. This would require not only questioning what is taken for granted, but also preserving what is valuable in existing practice. The cultural construction of schooling need not be a block to reform. It can be an engine of change if public discourse about education becomes searching inquiry resulting in commitment to a new sense of the common good. (Tyack & Tobin, 1989)*

Standards-driven school practice demands dialogue, not just documents. The task of developing standards and aligned assessments must serve as a catalyst for ongoing, action-oriented discussion about values and expectations, about the nature of teaching and learning and about what does or doesn't work in our current education systems. Concentrating efforts on creation of a standards document threatens to leave schools with just another thick notebook that collects dust on the shelf.

When our mental model of standards conjures up images of human behavior, we approach standard setting in new ways. The challenge, then, becomes not just agreeing about words on a page, but building the will and skills of individuals to make fundamental shifts in the nature of the work they do. The standards document becomes not an end in itself, but a tool for generating the conversation that builds ownership and the capacity for action.

More than a standards document, schools need a habitual and pervasive focus on quality. They need to become communities defined by their effort to articulate and continually re-evaluate what they mean by quality work and driven by a commitment to help all students achieve to that level. Schools committed to the achievement of high standards by all students can ill afford a mental model that suggests that they have standards when they have published and disseminated a standards document. High standards are realized only as individuals within a community together negotiate, construct and pursue a common picture of quality work.

The Standards Dialogue: Community-wide Constructions of the Meaning of Quality

THROUGH DIALOGUE SCHOOLS HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO DEFINE the quality of work they expect of students and the quality of effort expected of the entire school-community in order to get all students to that level. Through dialogue a school-community constructs a deep understanding of how students are doing and what both individuals and the organization as a whole might do to assure achievement of high standards by all students. Conducted conscientiously, these conversations become a venue through which a community can surface and acknowledge diverse opinions and beliefs and, at the same time, negotiate shared values and commitments to action.

The following section of this document includes a set of protocols for beginning the dialogue necessary for building the capacity to institute and sustain standards-based practice. Each activity was developed for use by schools working with the Western Assessment Collaborative and has been used both in formal workshops involving district or school leadership teams and at school sites in faculty or school-community meetings. Well over 200 teams have participated and provided feedback on the use of these protocols. The feedback suggests that they provide a powerful entry point into an ongoing dialogue about what's important and how schools might operate in order to realize a commitment to the achievement of high standards by all students.

The set of activities included here is by no means comprehensive. Our hope is that by initiating these activities, other necessary conversations and avenues for investigation will become apparent.

The first five exercises are designed to strengthen the will of the school community to engage in standards-based reform. These exercises acknowledge and help illustrate that organizing around high standards for all students requires deep changes in the beliefs and practices that sustain traditional practice. These activities are designed to help individuals surface and share those beliefs as a means of exploring potential new ways of thinking about how schools can and should operate.

We encourage readers of this document to try these activities in their own school communities. Wherever possible we have included participant worksheets, overheads and materials for this purpose. Please feel free to copy and use them. Facilitator directions and notes that draw on our own experience in facilitating these exercises are also included.

The last two activities are of a different sort. They are essentially investigations that illustrate the type of ongoing dialogue that can help teachers build and sustain the skills necessary to carry out standards-based instructional practice. Unlike the first set of exercises, which address generic issues in standards-based reform, these two processes are designed to be adapted to specific issues in a given school. The first helps build a shared understanding of a standard and how to teach to it. The second initiates an investigation into whether all students have access to the learning opportunities they need to achieve high standards. Facilitators for these investigations will need to adapt the processes to fit the needs and issues of the schools with which they work.

Our hope is that these investigations will help begin a dialogue about standards-based reform in your own school-community. We also hope they will generate a dialogue with us. As the Western Assessment Collaborative at WestEd continues its study and support of standards-based reform, we would like to learn from the experience of more districts and schools. We encourage readers to use the feedback form at the end of this book to tell us about their experiences in conducting these or similar dialogues about standards-based practice.

Exercises and Investigations

Exercise 1: So, How Was Your Breakfast?

Exercise 2: The Case for Common, Explicit Standards

Exercise 3: High Standards for All Students: What Do We Mean by "All Students"?

Exercise 4: The Implications of Standards-Based Reform

Exercise 5: Dilemmas of Standards-Setting

Investigation 1: Do We Share an Understanding of What It Takes to Achieve this Standard?

Investigation 2: Do All Students Have Access to the Instructional Opportunities Necessary for Them to Meet High Standards?

EXERCISE 1
SO, HOW WAS YOUR BREAKFAST?

Rationale

This activity explores ways in which external standards influence action. This is a useful exercise for introducing the concept and implications of standards-based practice.

Facilitator's Instructions

1. Hand out Participant Worksheet #1 on page 27. Ask participants to consider the first question:

   Did you have a good breakfast this morning? Why do you think that it was good or that it was not?

   Ask them to jot down whatever comes to mind on the worksheet and when finished, to share their responses with a partner or in trios.

2. When you have allowed enough time for everyone to produce a response and share it, distribute or display Overhead #1 on page 25. Explain that this standard has been established by the National Society for Gracious Living (which, if anyone asks, is fictitious).

3. After allowing time for participants to read the standard, ask them to reconsider their answer to the initial question and then to respond to questions 2 and 3 on the Participant Worksheet:

   After considering the standard, what would you now say about the quality of your breakfast this morning?

   Now that you have seen the standard, how will it affect your plans for breakfast in the future?

Allow time for participants to write out these responses individually before sharing them with a partner or in trios.

4. Direct the group's attention to the questions on Overhead #2 on page 29. Ask them to conduct a table group discussion of any or all of these questions:

   How did the criteria you used to define a good breakfast differ from those included in the standard set by the "National Society for Gracious Living"?

   How did you feel about the external standard? Did it make you think about aspects of breakfast you had not considered before? What questions did it raise for you?

   What would it take for this standard to affect your breakfast in the future?

5. Conduct a whole group discussion of the questions from Overhead #3 on page 31.

   What did this brief experience with a standard suggest about the ways in which standards might positively affect student performance?

   What issues did this exercise raise about setting standards for student performance?

   The facilitator may choose to record participants' findings on a wall chart.

Facilitator's Notes

The discussion is likely to raise the following potential positive effects of standards:

- standards can broaden and enrich our initial definition of quality
- standards can provide new information about what quality work is
- standards can act as a guide for how to improve
- standards can provide an objective definition of quality
- standards can enable self-evaluation
- standards can create a sense of "healthy dissatisfaction," a drive to improve

The discussion is also likely to raise the following issues:

- our willingness to work toward a standard is affected by the degree to which we understand or agree with the criteria
- external standards should be determined by reputable sources of expertise
- a standard can guide improvement, but does not assure it; increased capacity may also be required
- we do not always work "to standard" even when we are familiar with the standard and agree with it
- holding to a standard can be unfair if those subject to it do not have the capacity to perform
- a good performance standard is multi-dimensional; one can do well on some aspects of the performance and be weak on others

If these points are not raised by participants, the facilitator should look for opportunities to introduce them into the discussion.

Standard for a Good Breakfast

Determined by the National Society for Gracious Living

A good breakfast has the following qualities:

Ambiance:

Your surroundings are comfortable and attractive. You have agreeable companionship and are able to eat at a leisurely pace. The atmosphere is conducive to a cheerful and optimistic outlook on the day.

Culinary Aesthetics:

The food is appealing to the senses. It has a variety of textures and balance of hue. The dishes are both aromatic and flavorful.

Nutritional Value:

The meal achieves an appropriate balance of the main food groups, emphasizing carbohydrates, fruits and grain products with lesser amounts of proteins, dairy products and fats. It is low in fat and cholesterol. It has fresh, natural ingredients and makes use of whole grains and organic fruits or vegetables. It has the appropriate number of calories for your size and average amount of daily physical activity.

Individual Reflection

1. Did you have a good breakfast this morning? Why do you think that it was good or that it was not?

2. After considering the standard, what would you now say about the quality of your breakfast this morning?

3. Now that you have seen the standard, how will it affect your plans for breakfast in the future?

Team Discussion Guidelines

1. How did the criteria you used to define a good breakfast differ from those included in the standard set by the "National Society for Gracious Living?"

2. How did you feel about the external standard? Did it make you think about aspects of breakfast you had not considered before? What questions did it raise for you?

3. What would it take for this standard to affect your breakfast in the future?

Whole Group Discussion

1. What did this brief experience with a standard suggest about the ways in which standards might positively affect student performance?

2. What issues did this exercise raise about setting standards for student performance?

EXERCISE 2
THE CASE FOR COMMON, EXPLICIT STANDARDS

Rationale

This simple exercise is designed to help participants articulate the case for organizing work of the school around common, explicit standards for all students. While the rhetoric in support of standards-based reform may by now be familiar, oftentimes those on the front lines of these efforts have not taken or been given opportunities to envision for themselves its benefits for students, for themselves or for the school-community as a whole. In articulating a personal statement or rationale for standards-based reform, participants explore their own values and beliefs about schooling and their hopes and doubts about reform. These individual statements can serve as the raw material from which a school-community shapes its vision of a preferred future for students and the school.

Facilitator's Instructions

1. Display Overhead #1 on page 37. This overhead lays out the rationale in support of standards-based school reform. Ask participants to work with a partner or in trios to discuss the rationale and to be sure they understand each argument. Remind participants that they need not agree with all of them; the aim here is to become familiar with some of the most common arguments.

   If participants are not generally familiar with the rationale, you may wish to begin with a shared reading or video. The following resources give a good overview of the various arguments in favor of standards-based reform:

   "The Case for New Standards in Education" (T. Hershberg);
   "Stumping for Standards" (T. Cross and S. Loftus);
   "An Overview of the Standards Movement" (A. Lewis);

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Improving Education Through Standards-based Reform (McLaughlin, et al.); and
New Standards: Only Our Best is Good Enough (Videocassette by the New Standards Project).

Each of these resources is listed in greater detail in the bibliography on page 91.

2. Conduct a whole group discussion to address questions about any of the suggested arguments. Ask participants whether they have other arguments they would like to share with the group.
3. Distribute Participant Worksheet on page 39. Ask participants to work in pairs and discuss their responses to questions 1 and 2. Give about 10–15 minutes for this discussion.
4. After the discussion in pairs, call attention to question 3 on the worksheet. Give the participants 20 minutes or so to draft a personal response to this question.
5. Allow individuals on school teams time to share their rationale with one another. Although time may not permit the team to develop a shared rationale statement, be sure participants have time to give one another feedback on their individual statements. Display Overhead #2 on page 41 to guide the team discussion.

Facilitator's Notes

This exercise often leads to a discussion of why most schools currently do not have shared, explicit standards for student performance. It is important to explain that while states and school districts often have explicit curriculum outlines, these outlines generally describe what topics and concepts should be covered in the course of a school year, not what students should be able to *do* with what they have learned, or what might be considered quality work. The degree to which teachers are held accountable to covering these curricula varies from district to district and school to school.

In addition, you may need to point out that historically in this country, school governance has been locally controlled. Decisions about curriculum policy are made by the over 14,000 local school boards

throughout the country. Although state departments of education often publish state-level curriculum guides, frameworks and more recently standards, their use is, for the most part, voluntary. Most of the tests used to assess student performance across classrooms, schools and states are curriculum neutral; they are designed to measure not understanding of the curriculum itself, but subsets of skills likely to be found in any curriculum.

Discussions prompted by this exercise are likely to reveal the concern that standards documents themselves will not produce the desired impact, that it's what schools *do* with a standards document that makes the difference. Facilitators should acknowledge and celebrate that realization. Exercise 5 will explore it more deeply.

When school-communities define common and explicit standards for student performance:

- **educators and the public will have a more meaningful and comprehensive way to determine the quality of the performance of students, teachers and school systems**
- **grading of students will be less subjective**
- **students will know what is expected of them and will be better able to improve their own work**
- **school systems will be forced to address inequities in current programs**
- **it will be much clearer what resources are needed to support student learning and how those resources should be used**
- **teachers will be free to make professional choices about instructional methods and materials as long as those methods help students reach the standards**

Discussion in Pairs

1. Consider the points in Overhead #1. Which argument do you find most compelling? Why? How will your school and the students in your community benefit from having common, explicit standards for student performance? What are the consequences of continuing the effort to improve the school without them?

2. What challenges would you expect to hear in opposition to your argument? Why would you expect these?

Individual Reflection

3. If you were to make a presentation to your school advisory council or have a conversation with your neighbor about the need for common, explicit standards in your school community, what rationale would you offer?

Team Discussion Guidelines

1. Each participant reads his/her statement in response to Question 3 on the Participant Worksheet. The other members of the team should give the author feedback about which arguments, ideas or ways of expressing an idea they found most clear and compelling.

2. After all the statements have been shared, the group should discuss the following questions:

   A. How close are we as a school-community to articulating a case for setting common, explicit standards for all students?

   B. Are we interested at this time in composing a joint rationale statement? How will we accomplish this?

EXERCISE 3
HIGH STANDARDS FOR ALL STUDENTS: WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "ALL STUDENTS"?

Rationale

The rallying cry for standards-based reform is "high standards for all students!" However, that phrase means different things to different people. How we understand the phrase "all students" says a great deal about our beliefs about the purposes and goals of schooling, and about how standards are to be used to guide improvement efforts.

This activity is designed to allow participants to share their beliefs about which students should be accountable to learn what. It is likely that within any given school-community several different viewpoints are held on this issue. Although resolution of these various viewpoints may not be possible right away, it is important for differences of opinion to be acknowledged and for all participants in the dialogue to have a chance to be heard. At the start, participants may wish to acknowledge each others' perspectives and "agree to disagree."

As the school-community's dialogue proceeds over time, participants will want to revisit the beliefs explored in this exercise.

Facilitator's Instructions

1. Display Overhead #1 on page 47. It describes three very different ways of thinking about the phrase "all students." Each of these statements represents a point of view expressed by some promoters of standards-based reform.

   Ask participants to read each statement carefully and think about which one most closely corresponds with their own beliefs about standards and the meaning of the words "all students."

2. Direct participants to write a brief response to the first question on Participant Worksheet #1 on page 49:

Which of these three ways of thinking about the meaning of the phrase "all students" most closely corresponds with your own point of view? Why?

3. Ask participants to share their responses in small groups of no more than 3-4 members. Remind participants to listen to the responses they hear, but to refrain from commenting on them. Suggest that participants listen for degrees of agreement and disagreement among group members.

4. After participants have shared their responses, ask them to consider what they have heard and to discuss the next two questions on the Participant Worksheet:

   What do the various viewpoints expressed in this exercise suggest about the challenges of implementing standards-based reform in your school community?

   How might your school-community begin to address those challenges?

5. Bring this discussion to closure by asking representatives from the small groups to summarize the comments they discussed in a report to the whole group. The facilitator will want to acknowledge differences of opinion, look for opportunities to point out areas where several people agree and help the group think about the implications of this discussion for the work of standards-based reform at their school.

Facilitator's Notes

The question "What Do We Mean by 'All Students'?" can lead to heated discussion. Remind participants that the point of the exercise is to reveal different ways of thinking and, moreover, unlikely those differences can be easily resolved. Challenge participants to try to understand the viewpoints with which they disagree and to use what they have learned to guide the collection of evidence for future discussions. Perspectives that often come to light in this exercise can be summarized as follows:

A. There should be one set of standards, and significant changes should be made in the system to assure that all students *reach those standards.*

This statement is commonly heard within the standards movement, but it does not fit with the opinions of many people who:

- see the emphasis on the need to change the system as an excuse to set lower standards for student achievement
- believe students' differing ability levels cannot be overcome no matter what changes are made in the system
- are skeptical about the possibility that the system can or will be changed

B. There should be higher standards set for all students, *but the standards should be differentiated in recognition of students' different interests and abilities.*

This statement represents the belief that students' innate ability levels, or differing levels of motivation or interest, cannot or should not be overcome to bring all students to equal performance levels in all areas. Many people object to this statement because they:

- believe that if that viewpoint were implemented, schools would perpetuate the inequities of the current system
- are wary of the process of deciding which standards would apply to which sub-groups of students

C. There should be standards set at a level that would be ideal for all students, *but recognition that* all students *won't be able to reach those standards.*

This statement is often described as "most realistic." It acknowledges the need to set common targets at a high level for all students, but suggests that universal achievement of the standards may not be possible — or even desirable. For example, the thinking goes, do all students need — or want — to learn advanced algebra. Debate over this position raises the issue of varying beliefs about the purpose of schooling. Some will stipulate that the purpose is to provide rigorous learning opportunities for those willing and readily able to take advantage of them. Others will argue that it is the work of schools to strive for high achievement by *all* students, despite a student's initial level of motivation or readiness to learn.

Participants who do not select this statement as most closely corresponding with their own viewpoint often see it as an excuse to perpetuate the current system of differentiated standards: to "raise the bar" without acknowledging the need to refocus school practice to meet the needs of individual students or groups of students.

The discussion in this exercise is likely to raise many of the challenges described in the first section of this document. Commonly,

school teams will get into a discussion of their beliefs about whether it is possible to agree on a set of things students should know and do that are both attainable by all students and that do not limit those students who want to go beyond that level of achievement.

One of the most common points of discussion is the question of teacher and community expectations and their effect on student performance. Participants who believe all students cannot achieve high standards are likely to be challenged by those who believe they can. This challenge presents a wonderful opportunity for the facilitator to suggest further investigations of this issue. Facilitators may want to consider engaging the community in Investigations 1 and 2 described later in this document. Both of these investigations explore ways in which a school community can improve or increase the learning opportunities provided to all students.

Another issue that often comes up in this exercise is skepticism that school organizations can or will change in order to help all students perform to the same high standard. Part of that skepticism it seems, comes from not having explored the ways the system will need to change. The next exercise explores just that question and helps various stakeholders throughout the system to consider how their work will be different in a system committed to the achievement of high standards by all students.

Which of these statements most reflects what you mean when you say "all students will achieve to high standards"?

There should be:

A. one set of standards and significant changes made in the system to assure that *all students* reach those standards.

B. higher standards set for *all students*, but the standards should be differentiated in recognition of students' different interests and abilities.

C. standards set at a level that would be ideal for *all students*, but recognition that *all students* won't be able to reach those standards.

Individual Reflection

1. Which of these three ways of thinking about the meaning of the phrase "all students" most closely corresponds to your own point of view? Why?

Discussion in Small Groups

1. After listening to your colleagues, what do the various viewpoints expressed in this exercise suggest about the challenges of implementing standards-based reform in your school-community?

2. How might your school-community begin to address these challenges?

EXERCISE 4
THE IMPLICATIONS OF STANDARDS-BASED REFORM

Rationale

Although the rhetoric of reform argues that "all students should achieve to high standards," the phrase is often used without consideration of the changes in current school practice that would be required at all levels. In this activity the various decision-makers in a school community consider how their work would need to be different in a standards-driven system committed to agreed upon, high standards of achievement for all students.

Facilitator's Instructions

1. Provide participants with all of the following:
   - The Participant Worksheet #1 on page 53.
   - The Participant Worksheet #2 on page 55.
   - A copy of Overhead #1 on page 57— ***or***— if working with a team from a school that has already established standards for student performance, give each participant a copy of one performance standard for that school.
2. Project Overhead #2 on page 59 and read aloud the quotation from Ruth Mitchell. Tell participants that this exercise will help illustrate how the work of all decision-makers in a school-community may need to change if all students are to reach high standards.
3. Ask participants to work in pairs or trios and to consider the categories presented on the graphic organizer (Participant Worksheet #1). Direct them to put either their own standard or the Eighth Grade Reading Standard from Overhead #1 in the center of the graphic organizer and then to consider the question posed on the Participant Worksheet:

   How might we need to rethink our work if our school was organized to assure that all students achieved this standard?

Offer the following examples:

The category "Teacher Work" includes assessment practices. Participants' discussions should reveal that if *all* students were to achieve the same standard, all teachers would need to have a shared method of determining what it means to "demonstrate understanding" and a shared sense of the quality of work that meets the standard. Similarly, in "Administrator's Work," the graphic suggests participants think about necessary changes in resource allocations. In considering the standard above, participants might point out that in order for all students to read 25 books during the course of the year, classroom or school libraries might need to be augmented to make more books available to students who do not have access to a public library or home collection.

Illustrate how participants should use the worksheet to make notes from their discussion.

4. Reorganize participants in like-role groups of 6-8 members. Ask role groups to discuss this question from Overhead #3 on page 61:

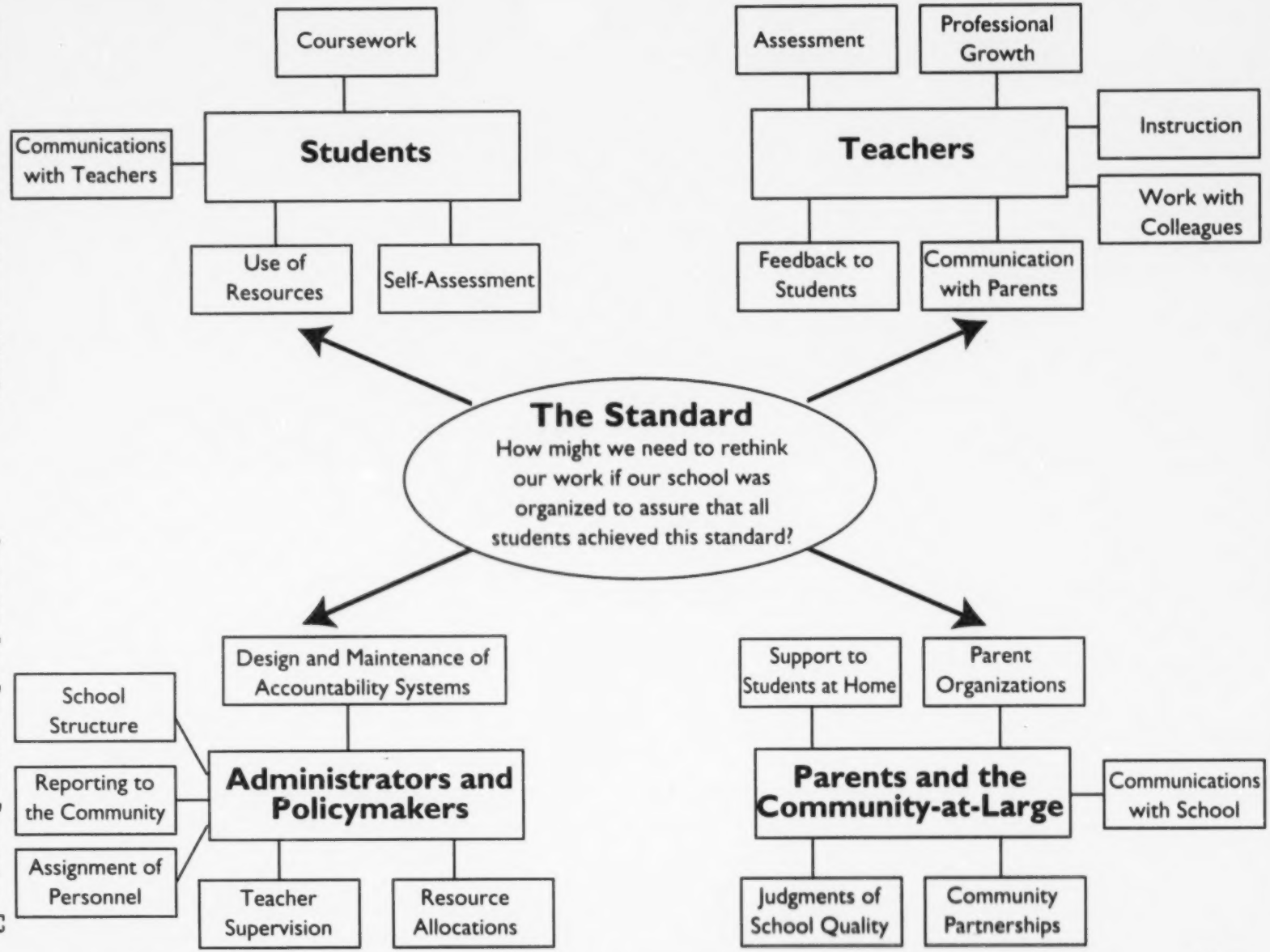
   What did I learn about what I need to do (as a parent, teacher, administrator, board member, student, etc.) to assure that all students reach this standard?

5. Conduct a whole group discussion in which representatives from roles groups share insights or questions raised in the small groups.

Facilitator's Notes

The purpose of this exercise is for participants to develop an understanding of the systemwide changes that would be required if schools were reorganized around a commitment to seeing that all students achieve high standards. Participants should discover that in addition to significant changes in classroom practice, standards-based reform requires that schools themselves be organized differently and that surrounding communities support schools in new ways.

Facilitators will want to be aware that in the course of discussion, participants may become overwhelmed and develop a sense that because so many changes are needed, no change can happen. One strategy for concluding the exercise on an optimistic note is to ask volunteers from various role groups to provide examples from their own experience that illustrate successful initial change efforts.


Coursework
Communications with Teachers
Students
Use of Resources
Self-Assessment
Assessment
Professional Growth
Instruction
Teachers
Work with Colleagues
Feedback to Students
Communication with Parents
The Standard
How might we need to rethink our work if our school was organized to assure that all students achieved this standard?
Design and Maintenance of Accountability Systems
School Structure
Reporting to the Community
Assignment of Personnel
Administrators and Policymakers
Teacher Supervision
Resource Allocations
Support to Students at Home
Parent Organizations
Parents and the Community-at-Large
Communications with School
Judgments of School Quality
Community Partnerships

Instructions

Using the categories portrayed on the graphic organizer on the prior page, imagine how the work of various decision-makers in the school-community would need to change if every student were to achieve the standard under consideration (either the sample standard that was given to you by the facilitator or one of your own).

Use this space to make notes in answer to the following question:

How might we need to rethink our work if our school was organized to assure that all students achieved this standard?

Students

Teachers

Administrators and Policymakers

Parents and the Community at Large

Others

Performance Standard Eighth Grade Reading

Students in eighth grade will read and demonstrate a deep understanding of at least 25 books or other text materials of the type represented on the recommended Eighth Grade reading list.

Standards aren't change in themselves — it's their effect that's important: nothing less than reversing the model of schooling as we know it. To this point, education has mirrored the stratification of society; 20% excelled and took professional positions expected by their socioeconomic status; 80% sat out their years in school and moved into blue collar or service jobs.... The system inputs remained the same and the outcomes varied ... students were sorted and selected and the results could be predicted fairly accurately from race, income level and family background.

In a standards model, the outcomes are held steady and the inputs vary. The system is responsible for seeing that all students meet the standards, no matter how different their needs may be. "All children can learn" has become a shibboleth of educational moral rectitude, but in a standards system, we have the incentive to deliver on it. What counts is not a student's achievement relative to other students, but relative to the standards.

The consequences for the educational system are profound. At every level, from the district central office to the classroom, one vital question determines policy and practice: "Does this help all students meet the standard?"

— Ruth Mitchell

Role-Alike Discussion

What did I learn about what I need to do (as a parent, teacher, administrator, board member, student, etc.) to assure that all students reach this standard?

EXERCISE 5
DILEMMAS OF STANDARD-SETTING

Rationale

Each individual brings to the effort of standard-setting his or her own values and beliefs about what standards are and how they should be used. This exercise is designed to help participants articulate those values and beliefs and, then, give them the opportunity to compare their own thoughts to those of others within their school-community.

Facilitator's Instructions

1. Give participants the Participant Worksheet on pages 65 and 67. Each row contains descriptions of two opposing viewpoints on an issue related to standards. Participants' opinions may correspond to one of these, be a compromise between the two or be something entirely different. Have participants read each of the opposing views and use the space provided to describe their own viewpoint on the issue.

   For example, on the first item, participants might agree wholeheartedly with Viewpoint A or B or write something like one of these statements: "Local school communities should draw on standards set by national curriculum experts in setting standards in their own communities"; OR "Standards should be set by professionals in various fields regardless of the opinions of educators or curriculum experts."

   Suggest that participants work alone to complete the worksheet.

2. After they have completed the Participant Worksheet, ask participants to meet and share responses in groups of five or six people. Direct teams to allow each person to read their response before going on to the next item.

3. When all participants have shared each response, put up Overhead on page 69 and allow time for the groups to discuss these questions.
   - On which issues do you have total agreement?
   - Are there differences you can resolve through further discussion or study?
   - Are there differences that feel irreconcilable?
   - How might you deal with these as you go about your standard-setting process?
4. Conduct a whole group discussion in which representatives from the small groups share insights or questions raised in the small groups.

Facilitator's Notes

This investigation is likely to highlight, rather than resolve, differing points of view on key issues in standards-setting. While some may feel these disagreements are better left unspoken, our experience suggests that if not brought into the open, these conflicting viewpoints can inhibit and even sabotage reform efforts. When raised and acknowledged, these values and beliefs serve as opportunities to honor the diverse opinions that arise within any school-community. As members of the community work together over time, they are likely to generate new insights, and the differences revealed in this exercise may diminish.

	VIEWPOINT A	VIEWPOINT B	MY OPINION
Standards should be developed at the...	**Local Level** School communities should maintain control of standards and determine for themselves what students in their schools should know and be able to do.	**State or National Level** Standards should be articulated by curriculum experts for purposes of comparing student performance and promoting equity among different school communities.	
Standards should reflect...	**Facts and Concepts** There are facts and concepts all children who graduate from American schools should know.	**Learn-to-Learn Skills** Because no one could possibly know all there is to know, our standards should not emphasize discrete facts and concepts, but cross-disciplinary skills such as finding information, problem solving, and communication.	
Standards should reflect...	**The Dominant Culture** Students should be prepared to participate and compete in the dominant culture so standards should emphasize knowledge, skills and habits of mind and behavior that are traditionally valued in the U.S.	**A Diverse Society** Students should be prepared to participate and compete in a diverse society so standards should also include knowledge, skills, and habits of mind and behavior that are drawn from non-Western and minority cultures.	
Standards are...	**Confining** Standards-driven educational programs reduce academic freedom and deny teachers and students opportunities to teach and learn about the subjects they love.	**Empowering** When standards have been well articulated by the educational community, teachers and students are liberated to work together toward those standards in their own way.	
School exit standards should be...	**The Same for All Students** School exit standards should describe what *all* students should know and be able to do.	**Differentiated** School exit standards should be set at several different levels such as for the college bound, for those moving directly into the workforce, etc.	

	VIEWPOINT A	VIEWPOINT B	MY OPINION ...
Standards should reflect...	**The World of Work** Standards should reflect practical skills and readily applied knowledge necessary to success in the world of work.	**A Liberal Arts Education** Standards should reflect a traditional liberal arts curriculum that provides students with a well-rounded education, some of which may not have "practical" value.	
Standards should be used as...	**A Grade-level Gate Keeper** We need to be able to tell students and parents what students are expected to know and be able to do by the end of every grade; therefore, some performances may be labeled inadequate for a given grade.	**A Guide for Describing Student Progress** Standards should suggest a continuum of development and experience that makes it acceptable to be at any level at any time as long as progress can be documented.	
Standards should be...	**Fixed** A standard is not a standard unless it describes a fixed body of knowledge and level of achievement.	**Evolving** Standards written today should change as instructional practices change, new knowledge develops, and students and teachers improve upon what they can do.	
Standards should describe...	**The Best There Is** Standards should describe the best work our students are currently able to do.	**Our Ultimate Goal** Standards should describe what we hope for or expect, even if no student can yet achieve those standards.	
Standards should be...	**Discipline-specific** Standards should be discipline-specific in order to assure deep understanding and breadth of knowledge in that subject area.	**Interdisciplinary** Standards should encourage students' ability to perform interdisciplinary tasks, because in the real world, knowledge is used in this way.	

Team Discussion Guidelines

1. On which issues do you have total agreement?

2. Are there differences you can resolve through further discussion or study?

3. Are there differences that feel irreconcilable?

4. How might you deal with these as you go about your standard-setting process?

INVESTIGATION 1
DO WE SHARE AN UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT IT TAKES TO ACHIEVE THIS STANDARD?

Rationale

Standards statements remain open to individual interpretation unless they are supported by specific illustrations of the behaviors one would expect to see a student exhibit if he or she were making progress toward that standard. Many schools have developed a set of desired student outcomes, but have not yet translated those outcome statements into explicit indicators of performance that would guide teachers to design instruction or assessments and guide students to improve their own work. Although many later generation standards documents include performance indicators and sample learning activities, these may not be "owned" or clearly understood in a given school-community.

This activity engages teachers in collaborative examination of student work. Together they identify the actions and habits of students who have achieved an outcome or are making progress toward it, and select exemplars that illustrate those behaviors. Through this activity the general outcome statement evolves into an explicit statement of what students are expected to do. At the same time teachers have opportunities to share and agree upon the types of learning opportunities students will need in order to make progress toward the standard.

STEP	FACILITATOR'S NOTES	EXAMPLE/COMMENTARY
STEP 1 Introduction	Show Overhead #1 on page 81 and contrast the outcome statement itself, with the detail on the chart as a whole. Point out that the outcome statement alone gives little guidance about what students should actually know and do, nor does it help teachers think about how to plan instruction. Explain that this investigation is designed to assure that everyone in the school community shares an understanding of a standard or outcome statement, and has guidance about what it takes for all students to achieve it. Described below are the steps of an inquiry process that should be conducted over the course of several meetings.	
Step 2 Identify a standard on which to focus community inquiry	Assist participants in selecting a standard that is the focus of schoolwide activity, but that may be open to a variety of interpretations.	Students will demonstrate the ability to solve complex, real-world problems.
Step 3 Brainstorming indicators	Ask participants to brainstorm what they consider to be the knowledge, skills and habits expected of students who are making progress toward achieving the standard they selected in Step 1. It may be helpful for them to think about a student they know who has already achieved this standard. Have them list as indicators the things the student does or knows that makes them think she/he has achieved the standard. After giving participants time to brainstorm and make notes alone, ask them to report out what they wrote and record the indicators on a wall chart. You should also make the Participant's Worksheet on page 83 available to participants so that they can make their own notes.	The student: • has a strategy for getting started • represents a problem situation graphically or with physical objects • restates the problem before beginning • clarifies the problem as necessary • checks the reasonableness of his/her findings or results • others?

STEP	FACILITATOR'S NOTES	EXAMPLE/COMMENTARY
Step 4 Plan to collect evidence	Ask participants to bring examples of work in which students demonstrate progress toward, or achievement of, the outcome statement or standard. It may be helpful to brainstorm possible sources of evidence in advance. Participants will need to decide whether all evidence should come from work in only one subject area or from many. For an outcome like the one in this investigation example, evidence of success might be found in a variety of work from different subject areas. Looking at work from across content areas provides a good opportunity to help participants better understand what it means to integrate skills across disciplines. Whenever possible, suggest that student work samples be accompanied by a description of the assignment students were given.	Participants might bring work samples such as: • problem solution essays • open-ended math problems • personal journals • reading journals • others
Step 5 Review the evidence and revise	When evidence has been collected, copy several selections so that all participants can look at the same work. Reconvene participants. Ask participants to work in pairs or trios to study the student work samples with an eye toward answering the following questions: • Where do we see specific evidence of the indicators identified in Step 2? • What other indicators does this work suggest? Participants are learning to "read" this work, not to score it. Encourage them to point to specific parts of the work that provide evidence of the outcome, and to avoid questions of whether any one piece is yet "good enough" to have achieved the standard. Although that discussion will be valuable at a later time, the present purpose is to sensitize the group to the many indicators and aspects of student performance, and to encourage them to apply what they learn to their own instructional planning. This discussion is likely to lead to the discovery of new indicators or the need to revise the wording of some indicators to be more precise. Record new or revised indicators on the wall chart and encourage participants to record the same on their worksheet.	For example, student work samples that illustrate how students begin the problem-solving process might lead participants to revise the first indicator from "has a strategy for getting started" to "brainstorms several possible strategies before beginning work." The second indicator statement gives a more explicit picture of performance and, therefore, clearer guidance to teachers and students about what is expected. Oftentimes new indicator statements are generated by the absence of a desirable characteristic in the work examined. When the discussion generates statements such as "I wish this kid had described the strategies he considered using before doing the one he chose," point out that inherent in that statement is another indicator of good problem solving technique. Add it too to the wall chart.

STEP	FACILITATOR'S NOTES	EXAMPLE/COMMENTARY
Step 6 Identifying powerful opportunities to learn and opportunities to perform	Ask participants to work alone or in pairs and to continue to look at other work samples in order to find examples in which students have produced strong evidence of the indicators. Ask them to consider these questions: • When students are successful in producing evidence of an indicator, what are the instructional opportunities to which they seem to have been exposed? (Opportunities to Learn) • What kinds of assignments provide students good opportunities to demonstrate their achievement of this standard or outcome? (Opportunities to Perform) Even when a description of the assignment is not available, it is often possible to deduce the kinds of classroom activities that preceded the students' work. If participants do not observe these on their own, the facilitator may want to prompt them by asking questions. (See examples in the next column.) The objective of this part of the exercise is to identify potentially effective strategies for helping students learn or practice the indicators. As participants identify powerful opportunities to learn or opportunities to perform, ask that they record them on their worksheets. The facilitator will want to make a copy of these worksheets and compile them on a single form to be given back to participants as they continue the investigation. In making preparations for the next session, ask participants to agree to use one or more of the strategies they have discovered in their own classrooms, and to bring back to the group's next meeting examples of student work that result from these efforts.	In this example participants might want to probe the student work for answers to questions such as: Did the work indicate that the teacher had taught students steps in a problem solving process? What steps were taught? How did the teacher prepare students to apply the steps in unique problem solving situations? Was all the evidence provided from "on-demand" problem solving? Were students required to identify real-world problems to solve? Were students prompted to think about various steps in the process? Can we tell from the work whether the teacher provided opportunities to practice problem solving on a regular basis? Does the teacher give feedback on the quality of the problem solving strategy? Each of these questions suggests a teaching strategy that could be provided to students in the interest of building problem solving skills. As these strategies are discovered, participants should record them on their worksheet as either opportunities to learn (instructional strategies) or opportunities to perform (powerful assignments).

STEP	FACILITATOR'S NOTES	EXAMPLE/COMMENTARY
Step 7 Continuing the cycle of inquiry	Use new student work samples to further develop the "Indicators," "Opportunities to Learn" and "Opportunities to Perform" lists. Be sure to leave time as necessary for a discussion of what teaching strategies seemed to create the most powerful learning opportunities. Encourage the sharing and borrowing of these strategies among all participants. Continue the cycle of inquiry until participants are satisfied that they have created a clear standard statement, including indicators and examples of opportunities to learn and perform to the standard. A good check of this is to ask participants whether they now have a clear enough understanding of the outcome to "teach to it" in their own classrooms.	When participants feel they have created a document that helps everyone understand what it takes to "demonstrate the ability to solve complex, real-world problems," they are ready to begin the discussion about "how good is good enough?"
Step 8 How good is good enough?	At this point participants may want to organize by grade levels or grade spans and begin to collect exemplars of work they believe are "good enough" or even better than necessary to meet the standard. This, of course, begins a whole new dialogue, but one that will be greatly facilitated by having spent time developing shared indicators and examples of opportunities to learn and perform.	

Students will demonstrate the ability to solve complex, real-world problems.

STANDARD OR OUTCOME STATEMENT:

In doing so, they are likely to exhibit at least some of the following indicators of achievement:	**These kinds of instructional activities give students the *opportunity to learn* to this standard**	**These kinds of assignments give students the *opportunity to perform* to this standard**
• Brainstorm possible approaches before beginning • Clarify problem • Determine pertinence of given information • Estimate answer before beginning • Restate or develop graphic representations to better understand the problem • Identify a plan for solving the problem • Use appropriate tools and resources • Try several approaches in a process of elimination • Break complex problems into smaller parts • Identify similar problems that may suggest a solution strategy • Verify solutions as needed • Others?	• Challenge students often to solve problems involving several steps and/or variables, or unforeseen circumstances • Give students guided opportunities to practice various steps in a problem solving process • Provide scaffolding in learning and practicing problem solving strategies: less experienced students are guided through steps in the process, but gradually expected to work independently • Give students the opportunity to identify effective problem-solving strategies in the work of others • Others?	• Make recommendations about whether to lease or buy a new car. • Make recommendations for the solution to a campus issue of concern to students and present to the administration • Plan an event within a given budget • Make recommendations on the purchase of a product or service from among several options • Others?

Do We Share an Understanding of What it Takes to Achieve This Standard?

STANDARD OR OUTCOME STATEMENT:

INDICATORS	OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN	OPPORTUNITIES TO PERFORM

INVESTIGATION 2
DO ALL STUDENTS HAVE ACCESS TO THE INSTRUCTIONAL OPPORTUNITIES NECESSARY FOR THEM TO MEET HIGH STANDARDS?

Rationale

It is often easy to recognize good performance when we see it, but much more difficult to imagine how all students might be assisted to perform at a comparable level. Our work suggests that often this is because schools have not carefully analyzed what instructional opportunities are necessary for students to perform well, and whether all students in the school have access to those opportunities. Collaborative analysis of student work provides a powerful opportunity to explore this critically important issue of equity.

STEP	FACILITATOR'S NOTES	EXAMPLE
Step 1 Select student work samples	Provide participants with samples of student work from performance tasks that represent the kind of work the school community agrees all students should be expected to accomplish. Select exemplars that clearly meet or exceed the standard for that performance task.	High School Exhibition Teams of students are responsible for conducting a feasibility study investigating whether or not to install a solar heating system for the high school pool. These teams are then responsible for making a presentation of their recommendations to the school board.
Step 2 Unpacking to discover requisite skills	Ask participants to analyze the student work by answering the following question: What valued knowledge, skills and habits does this work demonstrate? If the task is an authentic one, it usually involves not only knowledge and skills related to specific academic content, but also cross-disciplinary skills and habits of mind that are necessary for successful learning in many fields. List these habits and skills on a wall chart. Be sure to focus participants' attention on the examples of high quality student work. Although a partial answer to the question can be derived from unpacking the task alone, analysis of actual student work samples helps teachers identify the specific characteristics that distinguish high quality products from those that are not sufficient to meet the standard. These are the characteristics we want to be sure all students learn to produce.	Focus the attention of the group on two or three previously produced high quality performances of this task. A high quality response to this task would obviously provide evidence that students understand requisite science, math and economics concepts, and have mastered the skills involved in making effective oral and written presentations. In addition, students who produce high quality work are also likely to demonstrate other skills or learning habits such as: • the ability and habit of considering multiple vantage points on a given issue • the ability to present an argument with the needs and interests of the audience in mind • the habit of questioning the validity of information and resources • the ability to manage a multi-step project • the ability to contribute to the work of a team

STEP	FACILITATOR'S NOTES	EXAMPLE
Step 3 Considering access to opportunities to learn	Focusing on the identified knowledge, skills and habits, lead a discussion in which participants consider whether all students have access to the learning opportunities necessary for students to develop the required knowledge, skills and habits. For each of these, have the group respond to these questions: • Do all students in our school have access to adequate instructional opportunities to gain the knowledge, skills and habits necessary to perform well on this task? In which courses do we teach these things? Do all students take those courses? • If not, why might that be true? • What can be done about it?	Each of the skills described in Step 2 can be taught and practiced. As they are essential to success on a schoolwide assessment, all students should have access to opportunities to learn them. Yet it is not uncommon for schools to design rich performance tasks or project-based assessments and to assume that the skills necessary for good performance are being taught. Schools as a whole, and all classroom teachers, should be encouraged to closely examine the tasks and projects they give students; to ask hard questions about whether those tasks and projects provide opportunities to learn necessary skills that will enable students to succeed; and to question whether every student has access to these learning opportunities. Often this discussion reveals an assumption that these skills cannot be taught, or that only some students are ready for them. Facilitators might want to help the group test these assumptions by asking individual participants to share successful strategies for teaching these essential skills.
Step 4 Discuss implications for our work	If Step 3 has revealed that the learning opportunities necessary for students to perform the task are not available to all students, the group should be asked to explore the following question: *What is the implication of giving a schoolwide assessment for which all students have not had equal opportunity to prepare?*	This dialogue is likely to reveal inequities in the opportunities students are given to learn requisite skills and habits. As a consequence of this dialogue, schools may want to consider restructuring course offerings or making certain courses or learning opportunities more accessible to every student.

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Reader Feedback

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I. The Publication as a Whole:

1. I found *Standards: From Document to Dialogue* _____ to my work
   ___Extremely useful ___Somewhat useful ___Not very useful
2. The comment(s) I'd like to make after reading *Standards: From Document to Dialogue* are:

II. Exercises and Investigations

If you have tried any of the investigations in this document, please take the time to contribute your experience to our ongoing dialogue. Respond to the questions below.

1. Which of the exercises or investigations described in *Standards: From Document to Dialogue* did you try? What was the outcome of the activity? Did participants find it useful? How so?

2. Tell us something about your school community, the work going on in that community and why you chose to try this activity.

3. Based on your experience with this activity, would you recommend any changes in its design or in the facilitator's directions or notes?

4. Have you conducted other investigations in your school community around standards that you think might be useful to others? Please describe the process briefly and include any worksheets or materials that might help us better understand.

Please remove the feedback form and mail it to this address:

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